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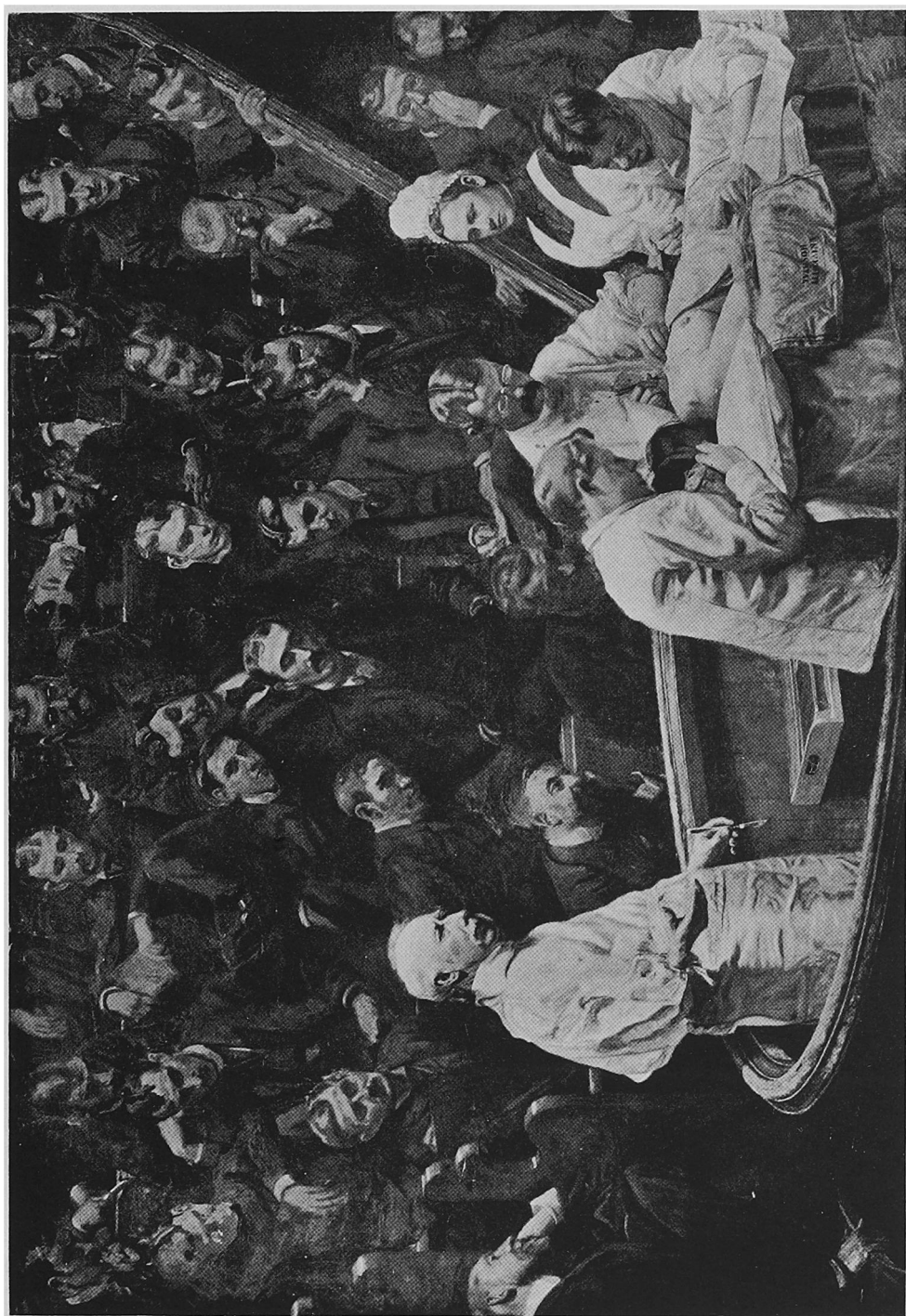
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THE AGNEW CLINIC

The technical side of Eakins' painting partakes of the scientific with a stress on the studies of anatomy and perspective. Much of his work is indeed stern at first sight, but a wealth of rare observation and enthusiastic workmanship is revealed. (The right hand figure of the two behind the nurse is Mr. Eakins himself.)

THOMAS EAKINS

Painter of Realism, with a scientific, though sympathetic, outlook on life.

IT is one of the tragedies of art, that during the life of the artist—if a painter—the public seldom has an opportunity of a comprehensive view of his work. At least that was the case with Thomas Eakins, who died last year, and whose works are now gathered adequately for the first time in his Memorial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

While artists at times have objected to their work being labeled as belonging to a particular school or movement, nevertheless the fact that it is almost invariably classified as a basis of criticism apparently is evidence of a need for this form of preliminary identification. In his introduction to the Eakins' Memorial Exhibition, Mr. Brighton Burroughs makes illuminating reference to the trend of the art world during the painter's life and further enlightens us as to some of the influences, external and internal, which affected his work. According to Mr. Burroughs—

Realism is the general ideal of the schools of northern Europe, though from about the end of the seventeenth century it was displaced by a courtly and artificial style in which, broadly speaking, reality served only as a more or less remote point of departure. The destiny of the nineteenth century was to set aside the trappings which hid from view the old tradition, and realism stands out as the main characteristic of the art of the century. The reaction began at the time of the French Revolution, taking the nature of a return to classical forms in which, however, the figures

were rigorously studied from the living model. The next generation, Ingres at its head, made further advances in this direction and it was the great rivals of the classicists, the romanticists, quickened by the English landscapists of the time, who in effect formulated the creed of the realists as we know it. Both groups were working toward the same goal, as now appears from our point of view, the one through form and the other through light and effect. With Courbet's pictures in the Salon of 1851 the development showed itself as complete.

Approximately the same evolution took place simultaneously in all the countries of European civilization. The Hudson River School in America was actuated largely by realism, but the efforts of its members were circumscribed by lack of foundation and experience. Certain of the young men who grew up in the atmosphere of this school were enabled to overcome these defects by study abroad—by contact with the main current of the movement in France. It is the work of the best of these, who were technically competent, even judged by foreign standards, and who still kept something of the quality of the rugged and homely America of their prime, which represents most significantly our artistic accomplishment.

Of this group was Thomas Eakins, sixty of whose pictures have been gathered for a memorial exhibition. It is the first time that so considerable a number of his works have been shown together and consequently the first chance that the public

has had comprehensively to judge his manly and thoughtful art. He was the most consistent of the American realists, and throughout the forty-five years of his artistic career his point of view remained practically the same. His interest was in the people of his surroundings and in their work and recreations, and from these he chose his motives. His continual search was for character in all things. The purpose of his work seems at times akin to that of a scientist—of a natural historian who sets down the salient traits of the subject he is studying—but in his case the scientific point of view was directed by a keen appreciation of the pictorial and frequently of the dramatic. The technical side of his painting partook also of the scientific with stress on the studies of anatomy and perspective, which, however, were kept in due subservience by his recognition of the higher elements of art. His pictures manifest always a contained and serious outlook; they are free from all vagueness in thought or form.

Eakins has never yet attained a general popularity. Only now and then did he condescend to please by charming color or elegant surfaces. Much of his work is indeed somewhat stern at first sight and his pictures demand an effort that all are not willing to give. But to those who take the trouble to enter into the artist's ideal, a wealth of rare observation and enthusiastic workmanship will be revealed; the austerities of the paintings are seen as fitting to the themes.

The facts of his life can be given in his

own words. In answer to a request for information about himself in 1893, he replied in the following note: "I was born July 25, 1844. My father's father was from the north of Ireland of the Scotch-Irish. On my mother's side my blood is English and Hollandish. I was a pupil of Gérôme (also of Bonnat and of Dumont, sculptor). I have taught in life classes, and lectured on anatomy continuously since 1873. I have painted many pictures and done a little sculpture. For the public I believe my life is all in my work. Yours truly, Thomas Eakins."

In elaboration of this characteristic letter it may be added that he first studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; that in the autumn of 1866 he went to Paris, where he stayed three years; that during those years he traveled in other parts of Europe and studied at various art centers; that in December, 1869, he went to Spain, where he painted Spanish subjects, among them "The Gipsy Girl Dancing" and a head of the gipsy girl, Angelita Requena; that he returned to the United States in the summer of 1870 and settled in Philadelphia, where he lived until his death, June 25, 1916. For a time he taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and later instructed a group of young men at his studio. In 1902 he was elected an associate of the National Academy of Design and later in the same year was made an Academician. As examples of his work as a sculptor we may cite the horses in relief on the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch in Brooklyn, and reliefs on the Battle Monument at Trenton.